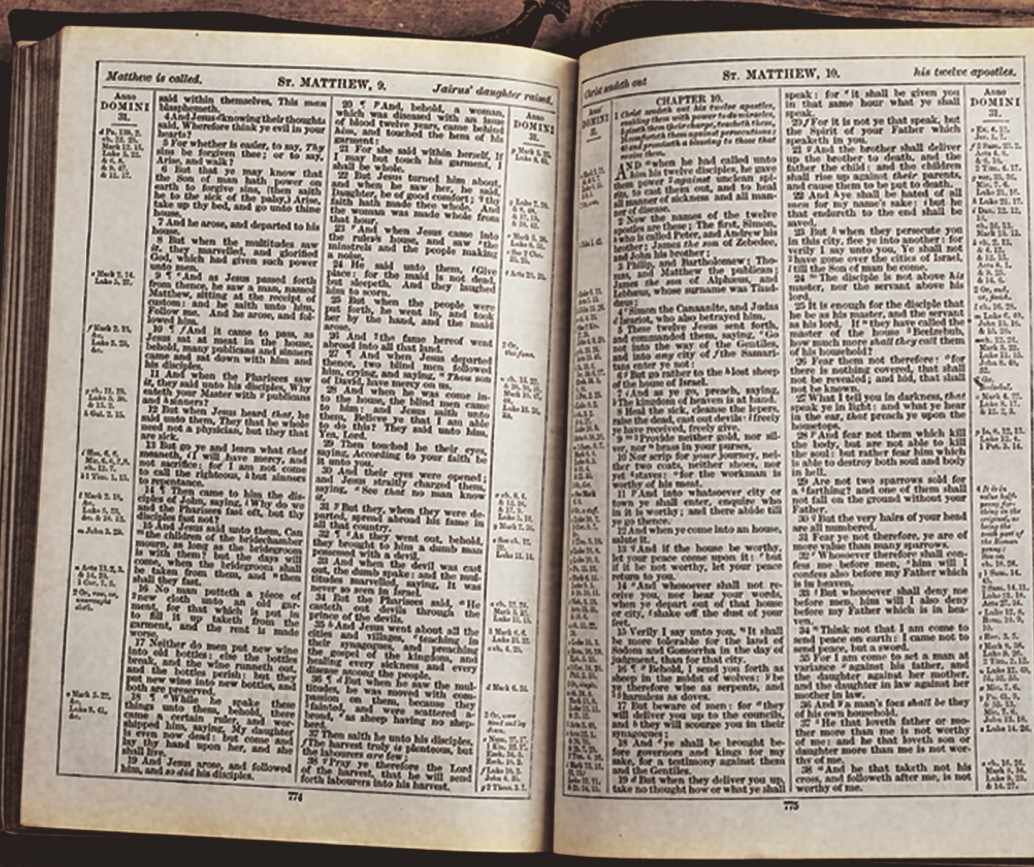


PERSPECTIVE

AUGUST 2016

True Hope, Genuine Power, Authentic Change: A Journey Into Biblical Counseling



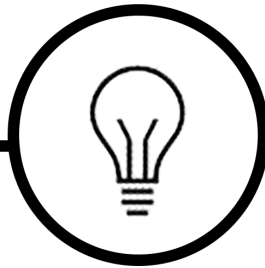
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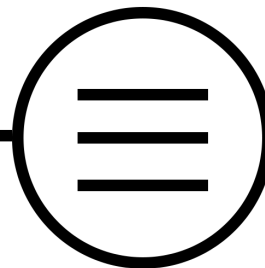
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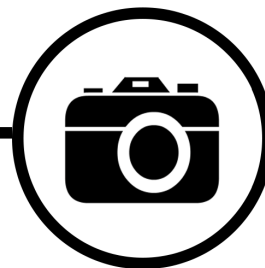
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True Hope, Genuine Power, Authentic Change: A Journey Into Biblical Counseling

My journey into biblical counseling is linked to the testimony of my Christian conversion. I want to explain how the Lord drew me to himself and the experiences he used to show me the beauty and power of the gospel and his Word. Along the way, I will describe what biblical counseling is, some of the ways it is different from what is commonly called Christian counseling, and how biblical counseling fits into the life of the church.

My path reflects the way God often works: the slow unfolding of his Word brings light and gives understanding, conviction, and power (Ps. 119:130, 1 Cor. 2:5, 2 Tim. 1:7). God drew me with cords of love, brought me into his family, and gave me a desire to serve.

Throughout the years, I've been exposed to many types of counseling, from secular psychological therapy to integrated Christian counseling. Eventually, I encountered biblical counseling. I now appreciate the truth of God's Word more deeply. I've seen the sparkling, life-giving hope that only the gospel brings.

I NEEDED A RESCUER

My parents are both believers and diligently participate in the life of the church. At eight, I heard a British evangelist give a clear picture of the way our sin separates us from our holy, Creator God. After the service, I talked to my parents about what was happening in my heart. I knew the deep guilt I felt was more than just a feeling. I couldn't make up for the ways that I had broken God's law. That moment God gave me the faith to believe Jesus is the Son of God, whose death paid for my sin and whose resurrection showed God's power over the penalty of sin. By repenting and believing, I found life in Christ.

As I grew, God used a trial in my family to show me my heart. My younger brother was angry and violent even as a toddler. As my parents struggled to manage his rebellion, I saw how my sin affected others. When I incited my brother or selfishly demanded my own way, the repercussions were swift and excruciating. Although he eventually owned his sin, I saw how my selfishness brought periods of chaos, disruption, and disunity to my family. I came to understand more deeply how I was

powerless to stop repeating the same patterns of sinful behavior. I needed a Rescuer.

Sadly, I often tried to do the rescuing. I developed an unbiblical approach to dealing with my brother's anger. I avoided anything that might incite it. I strove to deserve protection and love and tried to be blameless so that my parents didn't have to worry about me. I figured if I worked hard enough to relieve other's burdens, my brother's actions wouldn't destroy my family. In short, I focused on my performance in order to gain approval and attention. This pattern of self-justification became the functional operating mode of my heart. God saved me, but I had a lot of growing to do.

THE WILDERNESS OF SECULAR AND "CHRISTIAN" COUNSELING

God began to challenge this unbiblical thinking. During my freshman year of college I had deepening fears about my brother and his ongoing drug abuse. He threatened to hurt our four-year-old baby brother if I told anyone. (My brother later turned to Jesus in repentance and faith and is now passionately discipling others.) Meanwhile I compared myself with others academically, physically, intellectually, and relationally. I began pushing myself, trying to measure up, but always falling very, very short.

God's persevering grace was evident: I didn't question Jesus' identity and atoning work or the Bible's authority and inerrancy. I knew that Jesus alone had the words of eternal life (John 6:68). But I didn't have enough theology to process what was happening in my life. My biblical framework had huge holes that brought acute suffering. I began a desperate search for how God and his Word made sense of my reality.

Things got worse before they got better. I began a steady physical decline that landed me in several doctors' offices with prescriptions for clinical depression and a mandate to get counseling.

I started with an on-campus support group. I vividly remember opening my eyes in one session as the psychologist brought the room of women back to attention with her soothing voice after a brief meditative exercise. I glanced around, still seeing pain, anger, suspicion, and shame on the faces around me. We shared a common context of misery. We explored coping strategies, family dynamics, helpful medications, and ways to vent our pain. There was no mention of God or sin or our need of a Savior. And the risks of such free-form sharing among a group of people who struggle with

a common idol is that we learned more effective ways of manipulating our idols—and others—in order to get what we wanted.

Even though this support group and its leader meant well, our inability and unwillingness to deal at the level of the heart kept us spinning our wheels in the muck of cultural clichés. The psychologist reflected our emotions back to us and encouraged us to look within ourselves for the answers we needed. But I knew I was bankrupt inside. I needed wisdom from my Creator.

The problem with this counseling wasn't simply that we didn't talk about God. The issues were deeper: there was no mention of the idea that we are embodied souls who will face a Judge when we die. The central goal of psychotherapy is autonomy, asserting personal independence, living up to our potential. That's why therapists ask, "How do you feel about that?" and never ask, "How does God feel about that?"¹ In the secular counseling framework, we were our own reference point. We didn't talk about our Creator or the ways our lives reflect what we worship.

I continued my search for help and eventually connected with a Christian counselor. My therapist's name was Hope—a sovereign glimpse of what I would need to learn in the future about biblical transformation. I always felt better after I left her office, but I wasn't changing. She was kind and patient, but she never opened the Bible. She never prayed with me. At the time, I didn't see this as a problem. Even though I sought out Christian counseling to discover more about God and my relationship to him, our time together did not center on the Word of God or the hope of change through the Holy Spirit.

Eventually I attended a semester of Christian worldview training in psychology and sociology. I deeply respected my professors, and I loved my classmates. Nonetheless, the counsel they gave was man-centered. They focused on fulfilling our "need" for self-esteem, significance, and acceptance. They used God and people as tools to make us feel better. They assumed if only our "needs" were met, we'd be motivated to live happy, moral lives.

But the Bible distinguishes sinful motivation and godly motivation at the level of desire (Gal. 4:16-24, Eph. 2:3, James 1:14-16; 3:13-4:12). "If people crave self-esteem, love, and significance, they will be happy if they get it and miserable if they don't, but they will remain self-centered in either case. Scripture teaches that God changes our

desires and that godly motivation is rooted in the desire for God and godliness."²

I read many books on self-esteem and the unconditional acceptance we should live in as children of God. I knew Jesus was the answer, but I didn't know how all the pieces fit. I was still walking in significant futility of mind (Eph. 4:17) because I didn't understand God's process of change for the believer. I failed to identify what needed to be put off in repentance, to renew my mind with the truth of God's word, and to put on the new self in faith and obedience (Eph. 4:22-24). Even in this wilderness, God prepared me to see how "the love of God actually demolishes self-esteem and the lust for self-esteem. It produces, instead, a great and grateful esteem for the Son of God, who loved us and gave his life for us—the Lamb of God who alone is worthy. The love of God does not meet our lust to be loved as we are. It demolishes that deluded craving in order to love us despite who we are and to teach us to love God and neighbor (1 John 4:7-5:3)."³

MY PAINFUL EMOTIONS WERE FUELED BY PRIDE

Having finished my degree in Accounting and Spanish and passing the exam for Certified Public Accountants, I began working in a tax and audit firm. God had also kindly brought Darien into my life. He soon became my husband. Darien's gentle grace daily challenged my despair-inducing thought patterns and gave me a glimpse of another way. His encouragement and wisdom helped me to keep taking baby-steps of faith. Darien even lovingly addressed my assumption that I needed to remain on anti-depressants to be stable. As we worked on physical factors that contributed to my state of mind (I was critically low in key vitamins and my thyroid wasn't producing the correct amount of hormone), I was able to taper off the medication with the help of my doctor.

I still wrestled with what counselors, professors, and fellow-believers had urged me to accept during college. I knew intellectually my worth is in Christ, but I continued to struggle with depression, hopelessness, perfectionism, and fear. Darien pointed me to Christ. He helped me understand that I often dealt unbiblically with frustration, suffering, and my own sin. I acted as if Christianity is a works-based religion. I was utterly focused on how "not good enough" I was. Daily life became a continuous reinforcement of this conclusion. I was totally focused on *me*!

A key turning point came when a mentor (who was also a biblical counselor) reinterpreted my "low self esteem" through the lens of God's Word. My painful emotions were fueled by pride. I was focused on myself and my lack of gifts and abilities: I was "self-absorbed with a sense of failure." My self-hatred was a mask for pride. "Prideful people believe that they should be the source of what is good and that they should be the accomplisher of anything that is worthwhile to accomplish."⁴

My mentor followed this definition with thirty characteristics of a prideful person, and several beamed with neon lights in my life:

- Being focused on the lack of your gifts and abilities (focusing on yourself and wanting to be elevated)
- Perfectionism—striving for everything to be perfect so you can feel good about yourself and in control
- Being consumed with what others think
- Being devastated by criticism

My response to my mentor's analysis surprised even me: I laughed with joy. I could repent of pride! I could ask God to forgive me and change me so that I would be focused on his glory and his power, not myself. A ray of hope shone in my heart. I wanted more. I wanted to understand more of God's diagnosis of my heart and how the anti-fruit of the Spirit in my life was a reflection of the ways I worshipped created things and feelings instead of God.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IS DISCIPLING

I began to study the basics of biblical counseling, and what I learned only increased my thirst for the Lord and his Word. I sought for answers for myself, but I knew that others around me desperately needed help, too. God wanted to do first *in* me what he desired to do *through* me with others. I deeply wanted to know more about how God's Word connects people in the midst of sin, problems, and suffering. I wanted to know how to make disciples and teach others to obey, so that God would be known, praised, and proclaimed.

By this time, I worked at a nonprofit organization that focused on marriage ministry. I often found myself on the phone or face to face with women who shared deep and complex relational issues. I listened and prayed with them, but I wanted to bring the rich resources and hope of God's Word into the picture. According to Heath Lambert, a noted leader in the biblical counseling movement, I was already doing counseling (albeit with little skill). Lambert defines counseling as "a conversation

where one party with questions, problems, and trouble seeks assistance from someone they believe has answers, solutions, and help."⁵ Everyone counsels all the time according to this definition.

What makes biblical counseling distinct is its operating worldview that help comes from the Bible. God has provided a treasury of wisdom to meet our problems in Scripture. This is because, as Lambert puts it, "God defines what it is to be a human being, and he describes that in his Word. God knows what is wrong with us and diagnoses the problem in the Bible. God prescribes a solution to our problems—faith in Christ—and reveals him to us in the Scriptures. God authorizes a process of transformation and shows us what it looks like in the pages of the Old and New Testaments."⁶

WHY I AM COMMITTED TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING

As I studied, several key doctrines coalesced in my mind and solidified my commitment to biblical counseling. Authors and scholars have filled many books on each of these topics, but I hope my basic thoughts will show why I am committed to biblical counseling and will inspire you to explore these areas yourself.

Sufficiency of Scripture

The first foundational truth that transformed by view of God and his Word is the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling. Simply put, the Bible views itself as the "source of a comprehensive and detailed approach to understanding and counseling people."⁷ Christians therefore have everything we need to help people with their non-organic problems (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:4). The Bible is about the very things that counseling addresses.

God's Word provides not only the lens through which we evaluate all other truth claims, it also offers us the essential categories, concepts, and tools to understand and help others. This is why I am passionate in my pursuit of biblical counseling. I have great joy in knowing that I can focus my attention and energy on the Bible to best help others with the problems and challenges stemming from sin and suffering in their lives.⁸

Noetic Effects of Sin

The word "noetic" comes from the Greek "nous," meaning mind. This phrase describes the effect sin has on our ability to reason and think. In other words, sin not only makes us foolish, but it affects our capacity to biblically

interpret and draw conclusions about facts. We become “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13).

This truth is especially relevant for counseling in at least two directions. First, we must humbly and gently grapple with the way sin affects the thinking of those we disciple. Second, sin’s noetic effects impact unbelievers who provide counsel to those in need. Because of God’s common grace, unbelievers can know many true things. Secular psychology is often able to offer descriptions and observations that are useful. But sin most darkens our thinking at the very place that is at the center of human life—people and their relationship to God.⁹ So, while secular psychologists offer helpful information for counseling, their interpretations of man and the interventions they prescribe will fundamentally be out of line with the view of man God gives in the Bible.

At an intellectual level, the sufficiency of Scripture and the noetic effects of sin brought me to the decision of wanting to study the Bible and not the ideology of ungodly men. I realized that accepting and using the ideas, theories, and methods of people who hated God and rejected biblical truth was a form of walking in the counsel of the ungodly (Ps. 1:1).

True Hope

At a personal level, three other elements contributed to my commitment to biblical counseling. Only conversational ministry based on the Bible offers true hope, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the possibility of real change that pleases God.

Faith in the Lord Jesus is the only hope we have. Because of the atoning work of Jesus on my behalf, God no longer judges me as guilty. God is now my heavenly Father who sovereignly rules over each circumstance and every sin in such power that his purposes are always fulfilled for his glory and my good (Rom. 8:28). I have the hope of an eternal inheritance, a heavenly home, a new body, and most importantly, a faithful, loving God who is remaking me in his image and is able and willing to fulfill all his promises.

As Christians, we have real hope because Jesus has completely dealt with our biggest problem: our sin that deserves God’s wrath and the punishment of eternal separation from him. Jesus absorbed this wrath through the sacrifice of his body and rose from the dead so that we could be reconciled to God. Because of Jesus, we get to live with God forever.

Genuine Power

This hope comes alive in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. Biblical counseling acknowledges, invites, and trusts the major work of change to the only person who can affect it: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms not only behavior but our very hearts.

A fundamental way that biblical counseling differs from other methods is its concept of the inner person, captured by the biblical term “heart.” There are over 1,000 references to the “heart” in the Bible. It usually refers to the inner person—mind, will, and emotions. The Holy Spirit gives us amazing power to change in each of these three areas. We have received the Spirit who helps us to understand the spiritual truth that God imparts to us (1 Cor. 2:10-13). Through the Spirit, we have the very mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5).

Authentic Change

Lastly, I came to see that the Word of God and the Holy Spirit provide the only hope of effectiveness and genuine change in counseling. Only Christians can offer the hope of our holy, creator God coming to dwell within us and giving us the ability and motivation to change (Phil. 2:13).

The work of counseling could be stated as helping believers to behold the glory of the Lord. The promise of such work is that both counselor and counselee are in the process being transformed into the same image of the Lord from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18). We change as we behold. And beholding involves the work of understanding truth, committing to repentance and faith, worshiping the Lord, and obeying. Without the Holy Spirit’s gracious, effectual influence over our mind, will, and emotions, we cannot truly change in ways that please God, no matter how much counseling we receive.

As I reflect on the way the Lord decisively drew me to himself at an early age in salvation and then patiently and lovingly revealed more of himself to me through turmoil and suffering, I am filled with hope. I am deeply honored and humbled to be a voice of confidence in the Lord’s power and love to change us. Biblical counseling is utterly unique in its vision of help for others because we have an utterly unique message and an all-sufficient Savior. No other method of helping people offers the written and living word of God that alone can save us from all that is broken.

IN AND FROM THE CHURCH

Counseling fundamentally belongs in the church. As David Powlison put it, counseling is the church: “The church—as the Bible defines it—contains an exquisite blending of leadership roles and mutuality, of specialized roles and the general calling, of truth and love, of wisdom for living, of flexibility to meet the gamut of problems that sinners and sufferers face. The people of God functioning as the people of God provide the ideal and desirable institution to fix what ails us. That institution can adapt to take on a thousand different problems.”¹⁰

When biblical counseling takes place under the authority and supervision of the church, there is a built-in support structure that other counseling models acknowledge as critical but are powerless to provide. Christians bound together through church membership form a community of help that furnishes the best environment for gospel-centered, life-rearranging change.

Biblical counseling is about believers in the church speaking the truth to one another in love at the very places where sin and suffering are most evident using the powerful, sufficient Word of God. This is simply an intensive form of discipleship, which can occur without degrees, an office, or an appointment. Experienced disciple-maker, Mark Dever, defines discipleship as “deliberately doing spiritual good to someone so that he or she will be more like Christ.”¹¹ All believers in the church are to regularly be doing spiritual good to one another with words. Biblical counseling simply encourages growing skill and wisdom based on the study of the Bible to do so.

So why did I decide to study biblical counseling? I wanted to know more about God’s sufficient Word and how to grow in skill and wisdom in applying it to people’s lives. I wanted to study conclusions about counseling based on biblical exegesis, not theories that were backfilled with semi-related Bible verses. I wanted to bring real hope and the opportunity to truly change to suffering and struggling people. I wanted to deepen my dependence and conformity to God and the Holy Spirit in my own heart and life. I wanted to get to the root issues of the heart. I wanted to do this in the context of the family God has given to every believer: the church.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

I hope my story has pointed you to the power of God’s Word. If you are struggling and need counsel, please contact one of our elders or me. As a counseling intern for MVBC and now as a member, I’ve been blessed to

meet with several women at Mount Vernon the past couple of years. Ladies, I am delighted to talk or connect you with someone.

Some of you may be ready to give others hope and help from the Bible. In other words, you may want to grow as someone who disciples other believers, but you aren’t sure how to get started. Here are a few ideas. First, pray. God delights to enable and instruct his children to fulfill his commandments. Pray God would show you someone in our church that you could meet with regularly. Not only can you help that person grow in grace, you can be helped by them. Second, work through a counseling mini-book¹² or one of the articles mentioned above. Study and apply it to your own heart and then share what you learn with a friend, practicing giving comfort from God’s word. Third, consider an online class through the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF). Their quarterly courses are an excellent way to grow in skill.¹³ Finally, find me and tell me about what you want to do and your situation. I would love to help. May we bring God much glory as we help others to see his all-sufficiency.

~Andrea Lee

¹ Jeffrey Boyd, “An Insider’s Effort to Blow Up Psychiatry,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Spring, 1997): 26.

² John MacArthur and Wayne Mack “Is There Any Difference Between Biblical Counseling and Christian Psychology or Christian Counseling?” Found at <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/biblicalcounseling.html>. Accessed 4 July 2016.

³ John MacArthur and Wayne Mack “Is There Any Difference?”

⁴ Stuart Scott, *From Pride to Humility: A Biblical Perspective*, 5.

⁵ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷ John MacArthur and Wayne Mack, “Is There Any Difference?”

⁸ If you have interest or questions about this topic, please explore the following resources: *Counseling the Hard Cases* by Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert (ch. 1), “The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls” by David Powlison (article), “Is the Adonis Complex in Your Bible?” by David Powlison (article), *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* by Heath Lambert (ch. 2).

⁹ Lambert, *Ibid.*, 72.

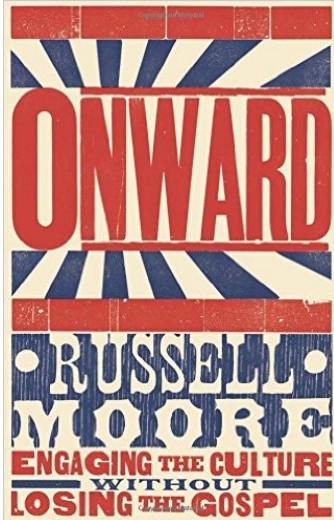
¹⁰ David Powlison, “Counseling Is the Church,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter, 2002): 3.

¹¹ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How To Help Others Follow Jesus*, 139.

Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel

Written by Russell Moore

Bookstall Price \$17



It is easy to look around at the changes in our culture and wonder what is going on in the world. Where once Christians were a “moral majority,” Christianity no longer sets the moral tone for America that it once did. However, instead of hand-wringing and despair, Russell Moore argues in *Onward* that this is good news for the church. Instead of continuing down the path of making our churches “relevant” or blending the church with the world so much that our values and practices are not all that different, Moore challenges Christians to “keep Christianity strange.”

In challenging many presuppositions of the past, what he has in mind is a clarification of what we believe and what it means to be a follower of Christ. It is an opportunity to take our place as a distinct culture among the people of our country, a counter-culture. Each chapter fleshes out a specific application of faith to our cultural participation and covers many hot-button topics like human dignity, family stability, and religious liberty.

Onward is a refreshing reminder that we live in the “already, but not yet” Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is not American or politically partisan, and our role in the Kingdom is to remain distinctly Christian. Once we seek a perspective focused on God’s Kingdom everything else begins to fall properly into perspective. The goal is not to be relevant, but to revel in our difference and speak truth in the world.

I was both challenged and encouraged by this book to revisit how I view and engage the rapidly changing culture around me. With much practical instruction, *Onward* can equip pastors, elders, and lay people alike with the approach and determination they need to share the gospel in these challenging times.

– RECOMMENDED BY SCOTT SULLIVAN

Excerpts from the Book

1

“The shaking of American culture is no sign that God has given up on American Christianity. In fact, it may be a sign that God is rescuing American Christianity from itself. We must remember that even Israel’s slavery in Egypt was a sign of God’s mercy.”

–Introduction p. 7

2

“The most important cultural witness the church has is not to raise up Christian filmmakers and novelists and artists and business leaders and politicians, although we ought to disciple those in all sorts of callings and encourage them. The most important cultural task we have is to crucify our incipient Darwinism, in which the leaders on the inside of the kingdom colony are the same as they would be on the outside, even if there were no God in the universe.”

–Culture, p. 82

3

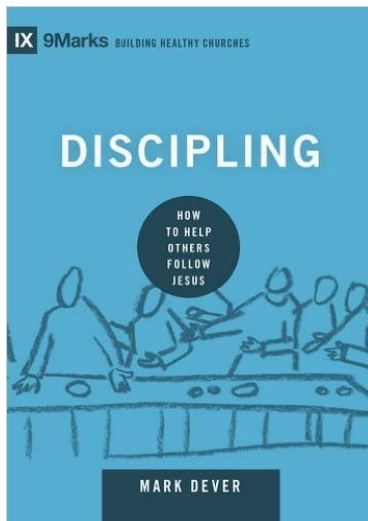
“There will come a day when Old Glory yields to an older glory, when the new republic succumbs to a new creation. We must not shirk our callings as citizens, but we also must not see our citizenship of the moment as the final word. We are Americans best when we are not Americans first.”

–Religious Liberty, p. 160

Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus

Written by Mark Dever

Bookstall Price \$11



“How will you use your influence?” So Mark Dever begins his book on discipling, and in ten very concise chapters, he guides his reader through the what, where, and how of discipling. Biblical discipling is an intentional “relationship in which you teach, correct, model, and love.” It takes initiative, sacrifice, and a healthy dose of humility. Dever expands our vision of discipling by pointing to our Christian heritage. How amazing to think that someone disciplined you, and it’s a tradition that can be traced all the way back to Jesus, his original twelve,

and the Great Commission. Indeed, the seeds we sow today are “time-bombs of grace” that often detonate long after we’re gone.

You may feel like you have the theology of discipleship down pat, but is your heart slow to join in? Throughout the pages of this book, one can’t help but be inspired by the sheer delight Dever takes in discipling others. In later chapters, he even reveals his personal discipleship playbook (a particularly helpful resource for pastors). I found his zeal for future church leaders to be a powerful antidote for my own slow heart. On a more practical note, you may simply be wondering how to pick someone. Do you ask the first person who walks up to you after service or call up an old friend in your neighborhood? Dever spells out the biblical wisdom and pastor’s heart behind encouraging a vibrant culture of discipleship primarily between church members. He then goes on to lay out nine practical factors- such as teachability, diversity, proximity, and schedule- one should consider before reaching that final decision.

Lastly, you may think you’re just too busy or not really qualified. Dever acknowledges you’re probably right. But he counters with the truth that some of the best discipling happens when we feel our weakness—God’s strength is on display! In addition, Dever provides encouraging ideas and unique examples of relationships between diverse people in various seasons that all measure up to good discipleship. This book left me not only without an excuse, but with an eagerness to be used by God within our church to disciple others. As Dever puts it, “Why would you not spend your life doing this?”

– RECOMMENDED BY DIANE MANNINA

Excerpts from the Book

1

“Biblical discipling...is helping others to follow Jesus by doing deliberate spiritual good to them.”

–Introduction, p. 19

2

“Do you want to know the power of God and a faith that works? Then give yourself over to the struggle of working for the good of others, even as Christ himself worked and struggled for our good.”

–Oriented toward Others, p. 30-31

3

“Discipling is the only way I can evangelize non-Christians and equip Christians in that one place where I can never travel—the future beyond my life. Discipling others now is how I try to leave *time-bombs of grace*.” (emphasis added)

–Oriented toward Others, p. 34



¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

-Romans 12:14-16

In Romans 12:1, Paul said “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” He describes such sacrificial living in the following verses. Worship to God is always demonstrated by our relationship to others. In Romans 12:14-16, we find four relational commands.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” There may be no more counter-cultural thing to do than to bless those who persecute you. At Jesus’ most agonizing moment—hanging on the cross as the sinless Son of God wrongly accused of crimes he did not commit—he blessed his enemies by praying for their forgiveness (Lk. 23:34). There is no greater blessing to receive than God’s forgiveness. Christian, who is someone in your life you struggle to love, someone you even consider an “enemy?” Pray for them and then find tangible ways to bless them.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” The Christian life is about selflessly living for the good of others. In the church, God has given us brothers and sisters to share life’s joys and sorrows. Their moments of joy and happiness are yours to enjoy. Their moments of

heartbreaking pain and sorrow are yours to cry over. Pray that your heart would be closely knit in love to others so you might rejoice and weep with them.

“Live in harmony with one another.” What binds us together in the church, regardless of our race, ethnicity, gender, marriage status, occupation, etc., is the unifying and peace-giving work of Jesus Christ. We worship the God of all peace. We have been given his Spirit to reflect his character. Christians filled with the Spirit will live peacefully together.

“Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” The biggest enemy to likeminded harmony is pride. Pride is the destroyer of selfless love. We are not to think proudly of ourselves nor associate with those who think of themselves as better than others.

It is fitting that the last command would a call for humility. For unless we are humble, we cannot do the other three. And humility, above all else, best describes Christ’s character. The sinless Son of God humbled himself for selfish sinners like us. Let us learn to do the same.

– BRAD THAYER

Graphic courtesy of The Verses Project. For more devotional material and memorization tools, visit www.theversesproject.com.

NEW MEMBERS



Brooke Braswell



Blake Egan



Blake Goedde



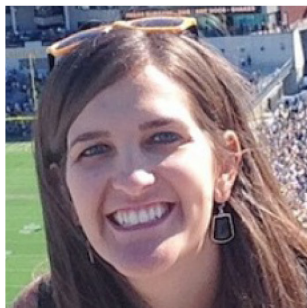
Chad & Jenny Ireland
(Colin, Ansley, Eli,
Noah)



Reggie & Tricia Claus
(Elizabeth, Abigail)



Stephen & Ashlyn Saucier
(Josiah, Titus)



Jessica Swafford



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH